United Nations A/53/459

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 October 1998

Original: English

Fifty-third session
Agenda item 85
Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects

Letter dated 5 October 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to write to you, on behalf of the European Union, on the occasion of the commemoration of 50 years of United Nations peacekeeping, which is celebrated by the United Nations on 6 October 1998.

By celebrating this jubilee, we pay tribute to the commitment, service and sacrifice of those who, in the course of the past 50 years, have participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations all over the world.

From the very beginnings of the United Nations peacekeeping, many thousands of men and women from the countries which today constitute the European Union have been serving in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Hundreds of them have lost their lives or been wounded in the fulfilment of the ideals of the Charter.

This year, over 4,500 troops and police from European Union member countries were participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Their number amounts to more than one third of the total personnel in peacekeeping operations. The financial contributions of the European Union member countries to the United Nations represent almost 40 per cent of the overall cost of United Nations peacekeeping operations. All this underlines the European Union's continued commitment to the core function of United Nations peacekeeping operations with regard to the primary role of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Recent events have shown again that, all too often, United Nations peacekeepers are placed in very volatile situations and would find themselves without adequate protection when circumstances worsen. The European Union is gravely concerned at the increasing security threat to United Nations personnel in the field, not least to unarmed military observers and civilian personnel.

Given the international community's continued demand for United Nations monitoring and observation, the European Union wishes to recall the obligation of host countries and parties to conflicts to ensure the safety of these operations.

Furthermore, the European Union wishes to underline the responsibility of the United Nations and its Member States for those participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations. In this connection, the European Union would like to urge all States to ratify the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. The European Union would also like to stress in this regard that the recently adopted Statute of the International Criminal Court covers, *inter alia*, the security needs of personnel of United Nations peacekeeping missions. As already underlined on other occasions, the European Union considers early entry into force of the Statute to be of paramount importance. The European Union encourages the countries which have not yet done so to sign

98-29233 (E) 051098

the Statute of the International Criminal Court and all States to ratify it. The General Assembly at its fifty-third session should take all necessary measures to ensure the coming into operation of the International Criminal Court without undue delay. The European Union would also like to reiterate that the safety and security of United Nations personnel is of paramount importance in the discharge of peacekeeping mandates.

The European Union attaches importance to the multidimensional nature of United Nations peacekeeping operations, which, of course, poses new challenges in the field. United Nations peacekeeping today does not only encompass demanding military tasks but a variety of other functions, such as civilian police activities, humanitarian assistance, demining, practical disarmament measures, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, enhancing and monitoring respect for human rights, and last but not least public information. At United Nations Headquarters, this requires a strong Department of Peacekeeping Operations which is able to fulfil its functions effectively. In the wake of the decision by the General Assembly to reduce progressively the number of posts filled by personnel on loan, we strongly underline that the Department's expertise and gains of the past few years must be retained.

The European Union takes this opportunity to once again express its grave concern at the precarious financial situation of the United Nations, caused to a large extent by the non-payment of arrears, and its adverse effects, especially in the field of peacekeeping. The European Union reiterates its conviction that all Member States must meet their obligation under the Charter and pay their contributions to the Organization promptly, in full and without conditions.

The European Union expresses its admiration and gratitude to all men and women who have served and serve under the banner of the United Nations in peacekeeping operations around the globe, and our appreciation of their courage, motivation and idealism. Likewise, the European Union wishes to express its deep sympathy to the families of those who have lost their lives in the service of peace.

In containing conflict and preventing violence, United Nations peacekeeping continues to be one of the Organization's most original and challenging projects aimed at the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. It is a work in progress, and in its history we have seen setbacks as well as ground-breaking innovations. The European Union is not only committed to playing an active role in further developing and refining this unique instrument, but also to having men and women from its member countries join the Blue Helmets in the next century.

I should be grateful if you would kindly have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 85.

(Signed) Ernst **Sucharipa**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Austria
to the United Nations